

General Assembly thematic debate on human trafficking, 3 June 2008

Panel 2: Protecting victims of trafficking and cross-border cooperation in prosecuting traffickers in persons

Remarks by H.E. Tiina Intelmann, Permanent Representative of Estonia to the UN

Estonia aligns itself with the remarks made earlier by Slovenia on behalf of the EU, and would like to add the following comments from our national perspective.

We strongly agree that trafficking needs to be tackled in a multidisciplinary context in which all actors and stakeholders co-operate, and that this implies complementary efforts at the national, regional and global levels.

From the national perspective, the provision of assistance and rehabilitation to victims of human trafficking and effective reaction to criminal offences related to human trafficking are among the priority objectives of Estonia's National Development Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings 2006-2009, which is the basis for actions to combat human trafficking.

Trafficking victims in Estonia have access to the Victim Support system, set up by the Victim Support Act, which entitles all persons who have fallen victim to negligence, mistreatment or physical, mental or sexual abuse, i.e. all those to whom suffering or injury have been caused, to victim support. Third-country nationals who are victims of trafficking and cooperate with the competent authorities are entitled to a temporary residence permit in Estonia.

However, the ground for effective action to prevent trafficking and to protect and reintegrate victims of trafficking in Estonia has to a significant extent been laid through cooperation in the Nordic-Baltic region.

Its driving force, the Nordic Baltic Taskforce against Trafficking in Human Beings, which became operational in 2002, was appointed by Nordic and Baltic ministers and consisted of politically high level members – which has been a necessary condition for effective co-ordination and securing political commitment.

The Taskforce initiated a pilot project to act as a starting point for a long-term change in the region with regard to victim support and durable solutions regarding rehabilitation and reintegration of victims, and to strengthen the gender perspective in policies, programmes and actions against trafficking. This regional project is being

carried out from 2005-2008, and has, among its main activities, helped build national networks of all stakeholders for the support and protection of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The national networks in the participating countries form the basis for the Regional Nordic-Baltic Network, which on the basis of the exchange between its members focuses on assessing existing practices, identifying good models, and developing new ones to better respond to the needs of the victims. The Nordic Baltic network has also developed shared resources aimed at setting standards for victim support in the region.

Another concrete outcome of the pilot project has been the establishment of help-lines and safe shelters in all Baltic States.

The concrete results and positive experience gained in the course of the project have now, at its conclusion, led to discussions how to carry on the established regional cooperation against trafficking in the future.

In addition to the Nordic Baltic cooperation, Estonia also participates in the EU cooperation project under the EQUAL programme for the integration of women involved in prostitution, including victims of human trafficking, into legal labour market. Estonia is also involved in the work of the Council of the Baltic Sea States Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings with a focus on adults.

Finally, I am glad to note that Estonia is also making preparations to sign the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in the course of 2008.

Thank you.